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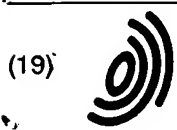
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(11)

EP 0 995 685 A1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:
26.04.2000 Bulletin 2000/17

(51) Int. Cl.⁷: B65B 69/00, A23G 9/28,
A23G 9/22, B65D 85/78

(21) Application number: 98119961.5

(22) Date of filing: 22.10.1998

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH CY DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU
MC NL PT SE
Designated Extension States:
AL LT LV MK RO SI

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(54) Frozen Dessert Dispensing System

(57) A dispensing system for frozen desserts includes a plurality of containers and a dispensing device. Each container contains an individual portion of frozen dessert, and includes a substantially cylindrical tube (1) having first and second ends (2,3), a nozzle means (4) towards the first end (2), and a piston means (8) located between the nozzle means (4) and second end (3), which is adapted for sliding movement along the tube (1). The individual portion of frozen dessert is contained within the cylindrical tube (1) between the nozzle means (4) and piston means (8). The dispensing device includes a plunger means (38) mounted for reciprocating movement along a longitudinal axis, a drive means (34) for driving the plunger (38) along the axis, and a support means (48) for supporting the first end (2) of the container with the plunger (38) in engagement with the piston means (8). The arrangement is such that with the container (1) located on the support means (48), the individual portion of frozen dessert may be dispensed by actuating the drive means (34).

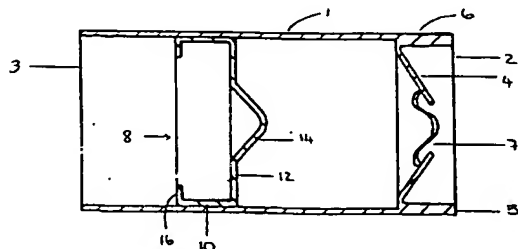


Figure 4

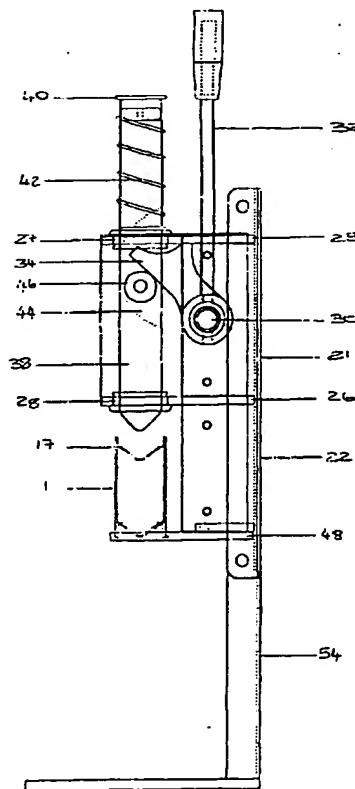


Figure 6

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Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a dispensing system for frozen desserts. In particular, but not exclusively, the invention relates to a dispensing system for ice-cream, frozen yoghurt and sorbets, including a plurality of containers, each containing an individual portion of the frozen dessert and a dispenser for dispensing the dessert from the container into for example a serving dish or wafer cornet. In particular but not exclusively the invention relates to an ice-cream dispensing system for use by ice-cream sellers, and in restaurants and fast food outlets.

[0002] Commercially, individual portions of ice-cream may be dispensed using a soft-serve machine, in which the ice-cream is mixed and frozen in bulk. Alternatively ice-cream may be dispensed using a dispensing machine from a bulk container pre-filled with ice-cream before being placed within the machine, for example the dispensing system described in WO 94/14333. These dispensing systems have disadvantages for both retailer and customer. There is no control of the size of the individual portions dispensed, and if not all the ice-cream is sold within a certain time period, there is the possibility of deterioration of the bulk product. The dispensing machines are expensive and bulky, and normally limit customers to just one flavour.

[0003] Individual portions of ice-cream also may be dispensed from large tubs using scoops. Although customers have a choice of flavours, this method of dispensing ice-cream is slow and time consuming. Again there is no control of the size of the individual portions dispensed, with the possibility of deterioration of the bulk product, if not all the ice-cream is sold within a certain time period. This method of dispensing ice-cream can also be less hygienic than machine dispensing.

[0004] Individual ice-creams may also be sold in pre-packaged portions. This alleviates the problem of portion control, however it cannot be readily used in certain commercial outlets, for example restaurants, since the portion can generally not be presented attractively.

[0005] A means and a method for dispensing individual portions of ice-cream is described in WO 94/13154. Ice-cream is supplied in containers, each of which contains an individual portion of the ice-cream. The containers are filled through an open end which is then sealed with a closure member. The containers are preferably hemispherical in shape or alternatively may be of a truncated cone shape with the side walls tapering inwards towards a circular base. When required, a container is placed in a discharge unit, including a plunger of corresponding shape. The plunger is activated, deforming either the container or the closing member and the product is discharged through an outlet either in the closure member or in the container.

[0006] There are however, a number of disadvantages with this dispensing system. The dispensing mechanism is complicated and expensive. The system

is not suitable for manual operation due to the large force, in the region of 30-40psi, which is required to dispense the ice-cream from the container. The container is shaped like a tub. This results in customers often assuming that they are purchasing a tub of ice-cream, rather than a ice-cream that needs to be dispensed from the container. The shape of the containers causes stacking of the containers to be difficult and results in a poor use of space. The containers are also difficult to fill resulting in the presence air pockets within the ice-cream. Furthermore, the outlet is so small that only ice-cream without particulates can be dispensed. The container is deformed during the discharge process, preventing the container from being reused. The container does not always deform as intended, resulting in unreliable operation. It is also difficult to expel all the ice-cream from the dispenser.

[0007] It is an object of the present invention to provide a dispensing system for frozen desserts that mitigates at least some of the above mentioned problems.

[0008] According to the present invention there is provided a frozen dessert dispensing system, said dispensing system including a plurality of containers and a dispensing device, each container containing an individual portion of frozen dessert, said container including a substantially cylindrical tube having first and second ends, a nozzle means towards said first end, a piston means located between said nozzle means and said second end, said piston means being adapted for sliding movement along the tube, said individual portion of frozen dessert being contained within the cylindrical tube between said nozzle means and said piston means, said dispensing device including a plunger means mounted for reciprocating movement along a longitudinal axis, a drive means for driving said plunger along said axis, a support means for supporting said first end of said container with said plunger in engagement with said piston means, the arrangement being such that with said container located on said support means, the individual portion of frozen dessert may be dispensed by actuating said drive means.

[0009] The dispensing system allows individual portions of ice-cream to be dispensed easily and attractively into either a cornet or a bowl. This system provides a choice of flavours, quantity control of portion size, improved hygiene, and the ice-cream is dispensed quickly and efficiently.

[0010] Advantageously the individual portion of ice-cream lies in the range 100ml - 250ml, and preferably in the range 125ml - 200ml.

[0011] Advantageously the container is sealed with a removable cover.

[0012] The removable cover seals the container until it is required thereby reducing the chance of contamination.

[0013] Advantageously the container is rigid, and does not deform or collapse during the dispensing process. Preferably the container is made of high density

polyethylene.

[0014] Advantageously the drive means for said dispensing means includes an arm attached to a pivot pin to engage said plunger, the arrangement being such that when said pivot pin rotates, said arm engages with and drives said plunger. Preferably said arm engages a wheel mounted on said plunger. Advantageously the drive means includes an operating handle mounted on said pivot pin.

[0015] Advantageously the diameter of the plunger is slightly less than the internal diameter of the cylindrical tube of the container.

[0016] According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of dispensing frozen dessert from a container containing an individual portion of frozen dessert using a dispensing device, said container including a substantially cylindrical tube having first and second ends, a nozzle means towards said first end, a piston means located between said nozzle means and said second end, said piston means being adapted for sliding movement along the tube, said individual portion of frozen dessert being contained within the cylindrical tube between said nozzle means and said piston means, said dispensing device including a plunger means mounted for reciprocating movement along a longitudinal axis, a drive means for driving said plunger along said axis, a support means for supporting said container with said plunger in engagement with said piston means, the method including placing the container of frozen dessert on said support means, operating said drive means to actuate said plunger, which engages with said piston driving it along the tube, and dispensing the frozen dessert through said nozzle into a serving container. The serving container may for example be a cornet or a glass bowl.

[0017] According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a container for use in a dispensing system for frozen desserts, said container containing an individual portion of frozen dessert, said container including a substantially cylindrical tube having first and second ends, a nozzle means towards said first end, a piston means located between said nozzle means and said second end, said piston means being adapted for sliding movement along the tube, said individual portion of frozen dessert being contained within the cylindrical tube between said nozzle means and said piston means.

[0018] According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a dispensing means for a dispensing system for frozen desserts, said dispensing means including a plunger means mounted for reciprocating movement along a longitudinal axis, a drive means for driving said plunger along said axis, and a support means for supporting a container containing frozen dessert in engagement with said plunger means.

[0019] Embodiments of the invention will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings of which :

Figure 1 is a perspective side view of a container;

Figure 2 is an end view of the container from the first end;

Figure 3 is an end view of the container from the second end;

Figure 4 is a side view, in cross-section, of the container on line IV-IV in figure 2;

Figure 5 is a perspective side view of the container with a cover seal;

Figure 6 is a side view, in cross-section, of a dispenser;

Figure 7 is a front view, in cross-section, of the dispenser;

Figure 8 is a top view of the dispenser, showing hidden details;

Figure 9 is a perspective side view of the dispenser;

Figure 10 is a side view of the arm;

Figure 11 is a top view of the support base;

Figure 12 is a side view, in cross-section, of a second form of the dispenser, with the container in position.

Figure 13 is a front view, in cross-section, of a second form of the dispenser, with the container in position.

[0020] As shown in figures 1 and 4, the ice-cream container consists of a cylindrical tube 1 with first 2 and second ends 3.

[0021] A conical nozzle 4 partially closes the first end 2 of the cylindrical tube 1. The tube extends beyond the nozzle and has an end face 5 for engaging a support. The wall of the end part 6 that extends beyond the nozzle 4 is slightly thicker than the wall of the rest of the tube, increasing the strength of the end part 6. The nozzle 4, which is shown in more detail in figure 2, includes a star-shaped aperture 7. This produces an attractive decorative pattern on the surface of the ice-cream as it is extruded through the nozzle 4, and allows the extruded ice-cream to flex so that it may be served easily in either dishes or comets.

[0022] As shown in figure 4, a piston 8 is located within the main body of the tube 1, between the nozzle 4 and the second end 3. The piston is hollow having a cylindrical wall 10, a circular first face 12 with a convex conical section 14 in the centre, and an annular second face 16. Figure 3 shows an end view of these features.

[0023] Alternative forms of the piston are possible, for example, as shown in Figures 6, and 7. The first face may be substantially conical in shape. Instead of having an annular second face, the piston may include a ring 17 on the rear surface of the front face.

[0024] Furthermore, to clean the tube thoroughly a lip may be provided on the circumferential surface of the piston (not shown).

[0025] The conical nozzle and cylindrical tube are moulded as one part from a plastics material, for example high density polyethylene. The piston is then placed in position within the tube such that the space between the piston and nozzle is the predetermined volume of a single portion of ice-cream, for example 125ml. The container is filled with the ice-cream through the nozzle and then frozen. The ice-cream is of the normal "soft scoop" type. Once filled, the first end 2 of the container is sealed, as shown in figure 5, with a removable foil cover 18 that adheres to the end face 5 of the tube, protecting the ice-cream from contamination.

[0026] The ice-cream is expelled from the container through the nozzle 4 by driving the piston 8 along the cylindrical tube towards the nozzle 4. The shape of the piston ensures that substantially all the ice-cream within the container is expelled. The container is rigid and does not collapse during the expulsion of the ice-cream. The thicker end part 6 reinforces the container to resist collapse due to the downward pressure applied to expel the ice-cream. Because the tube is cylindrical, the force required to drive the piston is substantially uniform.

[0027] As shown in figures 6 to 9, the dispenser 20 includes a housing consisting of an upper portion 21 and a lower portion 22. The upper portion 21 includes two vertical flat sides 23 with a curved front plate 24 and top and bottom plates 25, 26. Two bearings 27, 28 are located within the upper portion 21, one in the top plate 25 and one in the bottom plate 26. Mounted within the upper portion 21 there is a pivot pin 30, which is free to rotate about its axis. A handle 32 is attached to the end of the pivot pin 30, which extends outwards through one side of the housing. Also attached to the pivot pin within the housing at an acute angle to the handle is an arm 34. Both the handle 32 and the arm 34 are perpendicular to the axis of the pivot pin 30.

[0028] The arm 34, also shown in figure 10, consists of a plate with a lower edge 35 and a top edge 36. The top edge 36 includes a stop member 37, which is horizontal when the handle 32 is in the upper position and engages with the top plate 25.

[0029] A cylindrical plunger 38 is mounted vertically within the housing for reciprocating movement along its longitudinal axis. The diameter of the plunger is slightly less than the internal diameter of the container 1, and the base of the plunger is substantially conical in shape. The bearings 27, 28 allow the plunger to move through the housing. At the top of the plunger there is a stop mechanism 40. A spring return mechanism 42 is provided, which biases the plunger vertically upwards.

The spring return mechanism 42 is situated between the stop mechanism 40 and the top bearing 27. Extending through the central part of the plunger is a slot 44. A wheel 46 is mounted within the slot 44, on which the lower edge 35 of the arm 34 rests.

[0030] The lower portion 22 of the housing is narrower from front to back than the upper portion. Attached to the base of the lower portion 22 is a horizontal support plate 48. The support plate 48, also shown in figure 11, includes an open circular aperture 49 at the front end which is co-axial with the axis of the plunger 38. Around the edge of the aperture there is a C-shaped support surface 50 for engaging the end face 5 of the container such that the container is supported in an upright position with the axis of the container in line with the axis of the plunger 38.

[0031] A cap 52 is attached to the top of the upper portion 21 of the housing to hide the drive mechanism.

[0032] The dispenser 20 may either be wall mounted or mounted on a stand 54.

[0033] In the rest position, the handle 32 of the dispenser is in a vertical position. The operator pulls the handle 32 forwards, rotating the pivot pin 30. The arm 34 in turn engages the wheel 46 causing the plunger 38 to move downwards. Once the handle 32 is released, the spring return mechanism 42 drives the plunger 38 upwards to its original position within the housing.

[0034] The method of dispensing will now be described.

[0035] A customer chooses the desired flavour of ice-cream from the variety of flavours on offer. The operator removes a container of the selected flavour from the refrigerator. The protective foil cover is removed and the container placed vertically in position on the support base of the dispenser. A wafer cornet or bowl is held below the container. The handle of the dispenser is pulled forwards, towards the operator, driving the plunger down towards the container. The plunger engages the piston, forcing the ice-cream out of the nozzle. Expulsion of the ice-cream can be carefully controlled by the operation of the handle, enabling the operator to obtain the desired presentation. Once the individual portion of ice-cream has been expelled from the container, the plunger can be returned to its original position by releasing the handle. The ice-cream is then given to the customer, and the container removed and disposed of, or may be cleaned and refilled.

[0036] As will be apparent, the dispenser is very simple and easy to maintain and use. The dispenser is easy to operate manually since only a relatively small amount of force, about 8-9psi, is required to dispense the ice-cream from a container. The container is a tube, resulting in efficient packing of the containers within a freezer. Due to the shape of the container it is also obvious to customers that the ice-cream needs to be dispensed before they can eat it. The aperture of the nozzle is large enough to enable ice-cream containing particulates to be dispensed just as easily as smooth

ice-cream. Thus this dispensing system enables different types and flavours of ice-cream to be served attractively quickly and easily. The design of the dispensing system is such that it is not necessary to dismantle any part of the dispenser in order to insert the container. The container is simply inserted perpendicularly to the axis of the plunger, and placed on the support base of the dispenser. The plunger is then brought into engagement with the piston of the container. After dispensing the ice-cream, the container is just as easily removed and disposed of appropriately. The system also reduces the possible hygiene problems associated with the scoop method of supplying ice-cream since the ice-cream sold is sealed until required, and the dispenser does not come into contact with the ice-cream.

[0037] Various modifications of the dispensing system are envisaged, for example a pulley mechanism could be used in the dispenser instead of a cam mechanism, as shown in figures 12 and 13. Within the housing, a quadrant 56 is attached to the pivot pin 30. A cord 58 is attached to the top of the plunger 38 and to the base of the quadrant 56. There is a groove in the circumferential edge of the quadrant 56, in which the cord rests. When the handle 32 is pulled the quadrant 56 rotates downward pulling the cord 58 which in turn causes the plunger 38 to be driven downwards. The spring return mechanism 42, which then biases the plunger vertically upwards, is positioned between a stop member 59 on the plunger 38 and the lower bearing 28. Instead of being conical, the base of the plunger 38 may also be flat.

[0038] Furthermore, instead of making the whole container out of plastic, the tube may be of waxed cardboard with a plastic nozzle and piston.

Claims

1. A dispensing system for frozen desserts, said dispensing system including a plurality of containers and a dispensing device, each container containing an individual portion of frozen dessert, said container including a substantially cylindrical tube having first and second ends, a nozzle means towards said first end, a piston means located between said nozzle means and said second end, said piston means being adapted for sliding movement along the tube, said individual portion of frozen dessert being contained within the cylindrical tube between said nozzle means and said piston means, said dispensing device including a plunger means mounted for reciprocating movement along a longitudinal axis, a drive means for driving said plunger along said axis, a support means for supporting said first end of said container with said plunger in engagement with said piston means, the arrangement being such that with said container located on said support means, the individual portion of frozen dessert may be dispensed by actuating said drive

means.

2. A dispensing system according to claim 1, wherein said individual portion lies in the range 100ml - 250ml.
3. A dispensing system according to claim 2, wherein said individual portion preferably lies in the range 125ml - 200ml.
4. A dispensing system according to any of the preceding claims, wherein said first end of said container is sealed with a removable cover.
5. A dispensing system according to any of the preceding claims, wherein said container is rigid.
6. A dispensing system according to claim 5, wherein said container is made of high density polyethylene.
7. A dispensing system according to claim 1, wherein said drive means includes an arm attached to a pivot pin to engage said plunger, the arrangement being such that when said pivot pin rotates, said arm engages with and drives said plunger.
8. A dispensing system according to claim 7, wherein said arm engages a wheel mounted on said plunger.
9. A dispensing system according to claim 7 or claim 8, wherein said drive means includes an operating handle mounted on said pivot pin.
10. A dispensing system according to claim 1, wherein the diameter of said plunger is slightly less than the internal diameter of the cylindrical tube of said container.
11. A method of dispensing frozen dessert from a container containing an individual portion of frozen dessert using a dispensing device, said container including a substantially cylindrical tube having first and second ends, a nozzle means towards said first end, a piston means located between said nozzle means and said second end, said piston means being adapted for sliding movement along the tube, said individual portion of frozen dessert being contained within the cylindrical tube between said nozzle means and said piston means, said dispensing device including a plunger means mounted for reciprocating movement along a longitudinal axis, a drive means for driving said plunger along said axis, a support means for supporting said container with said plunger in engagement with said piston means, the method comprising placing the container of frozen dessert on said support means, operating said drive means to actuate said plunger,

which engages with said piston driving it along the tube, and dispensing the frozen dessert through said nozzle into a serving container.

12. A container for use in a dispensing system for frozen desserts, said container containing an individual portion of frozen dessert, said container including a substantially cylindrical tube having first and second ends, a nozzle means towards said first end, a piston means located between said nozzle means and said second end, said piston means being adapted for sliding movement along the tube, said individual portion of frozen dessert being contained within the cylindrical tube between said nozzle means and said piston means. 5 10 15
13. A container according to claim 12, wherein said individual portion lies in the range 100ml - 250ml.
14. A container according to claim 13, wherein said individual portion preferably lies in the range 125ml - 200ml. 20
15. A container according to any one of claims 12 to 14, wherein said first end of said container is sealed with a removable cover. 25
16. A container according to any of claims 12 to 15, wherein said container is rigid. 30
17. A container according to claim 16, wherein said container is made of high density polyethylene.
18. A dispensing means for a dispensing system for frozen desserts, said dispensing means including a plunger means mounted for reciprocating movement along a longitudinal axis, a drive means for driving said plunger along said axis, and a support means for supporting a container containing frozen dessert in engagement with said plunger means. 35 40
19. A dispensing means according to claim 18, wherein said drive means includes an arm attached to a pivot pin to engage said plunger, the arrangement being such that when said pivot pin rotates, said arm engages with and drives said plunger. 45
20. A dispensing means according to claim 19, wherein said arm engages a wheel mounted on said plunger. 50
21. A dispensing means according to claim 19 or claim 20, wherein said drive means includes an operating handle mounted on said pivot pin. 55

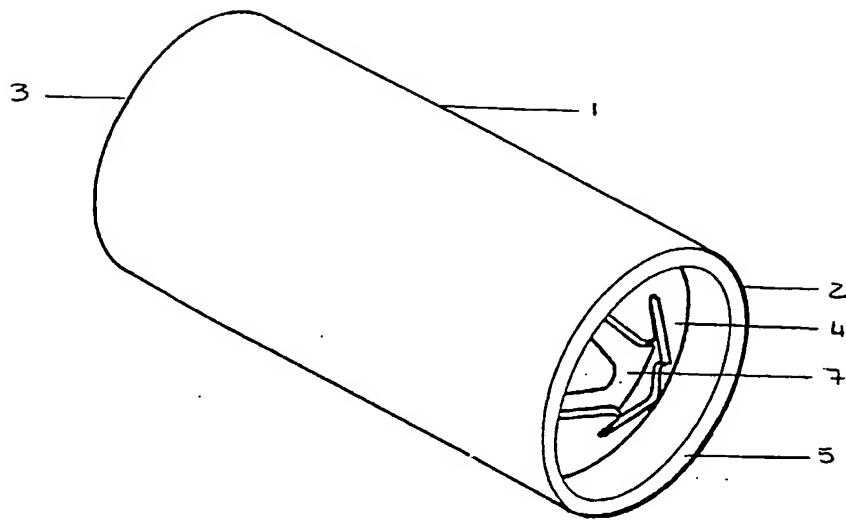


Figure 1

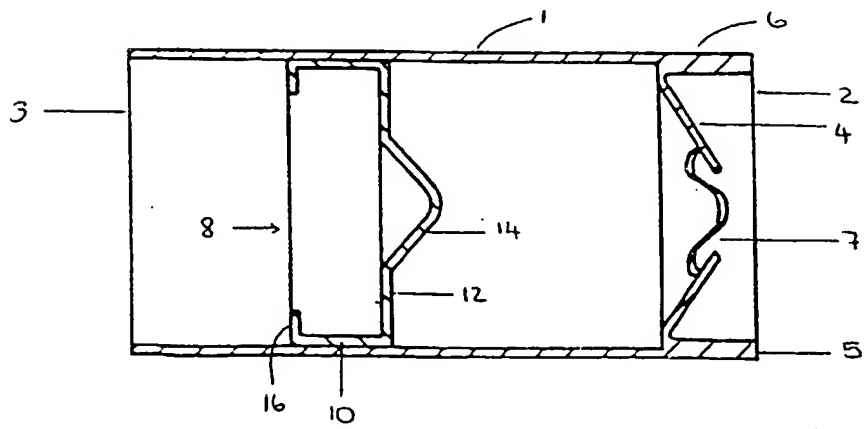


Figure 4

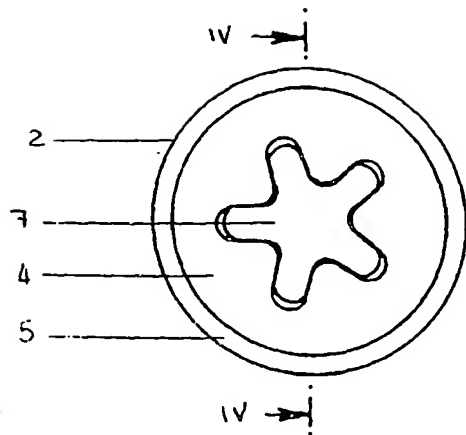


Figure 2

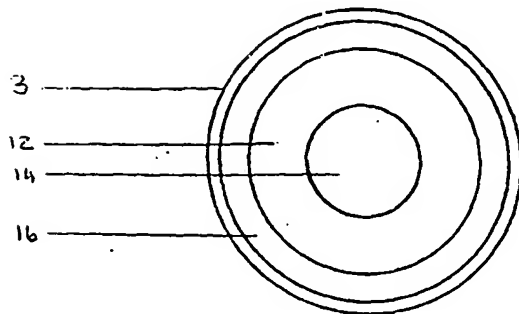


Figure 3

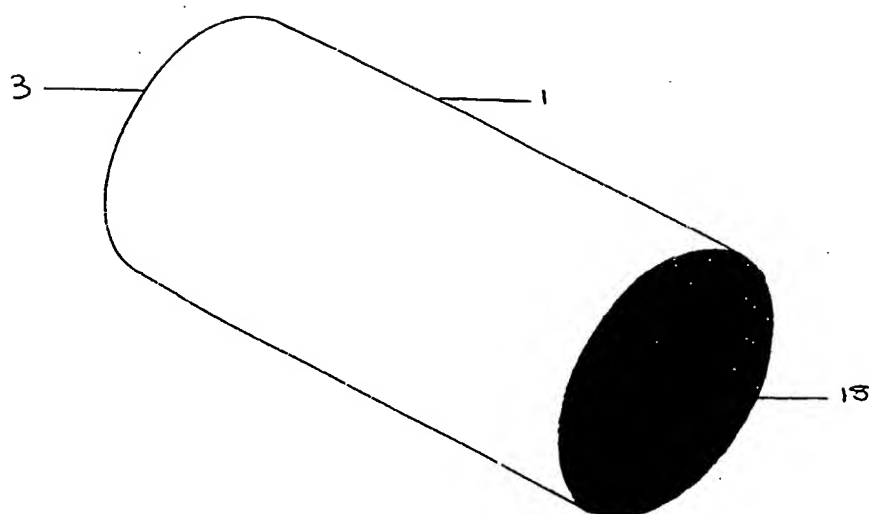


Figure 5.

Figure 6

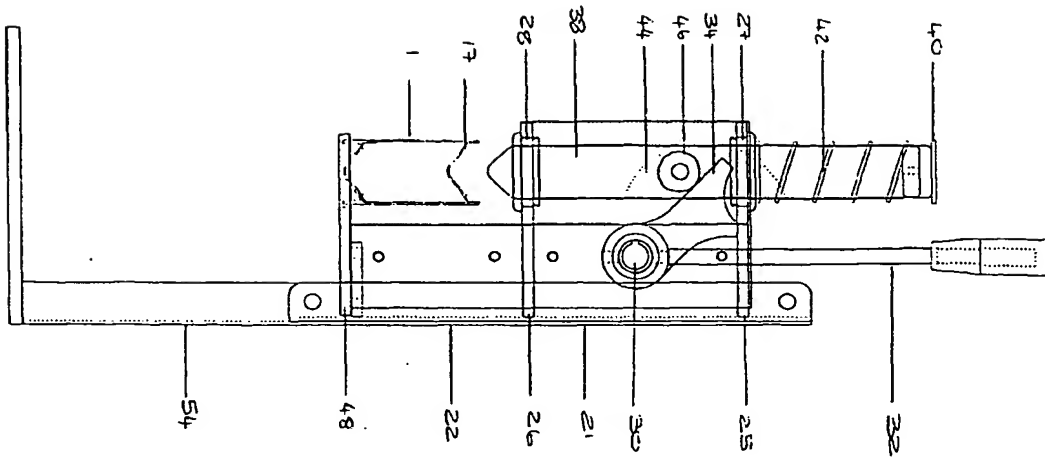


Figure 7

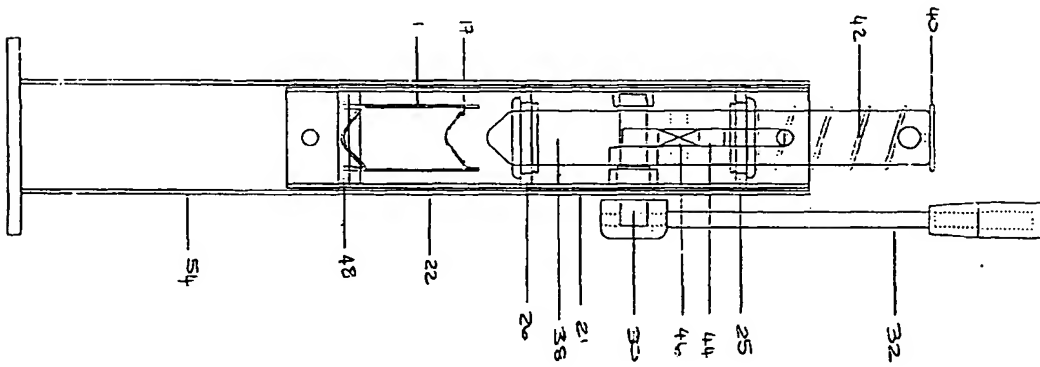
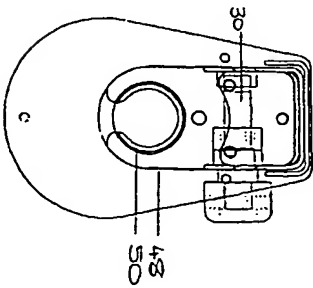


Figure 8



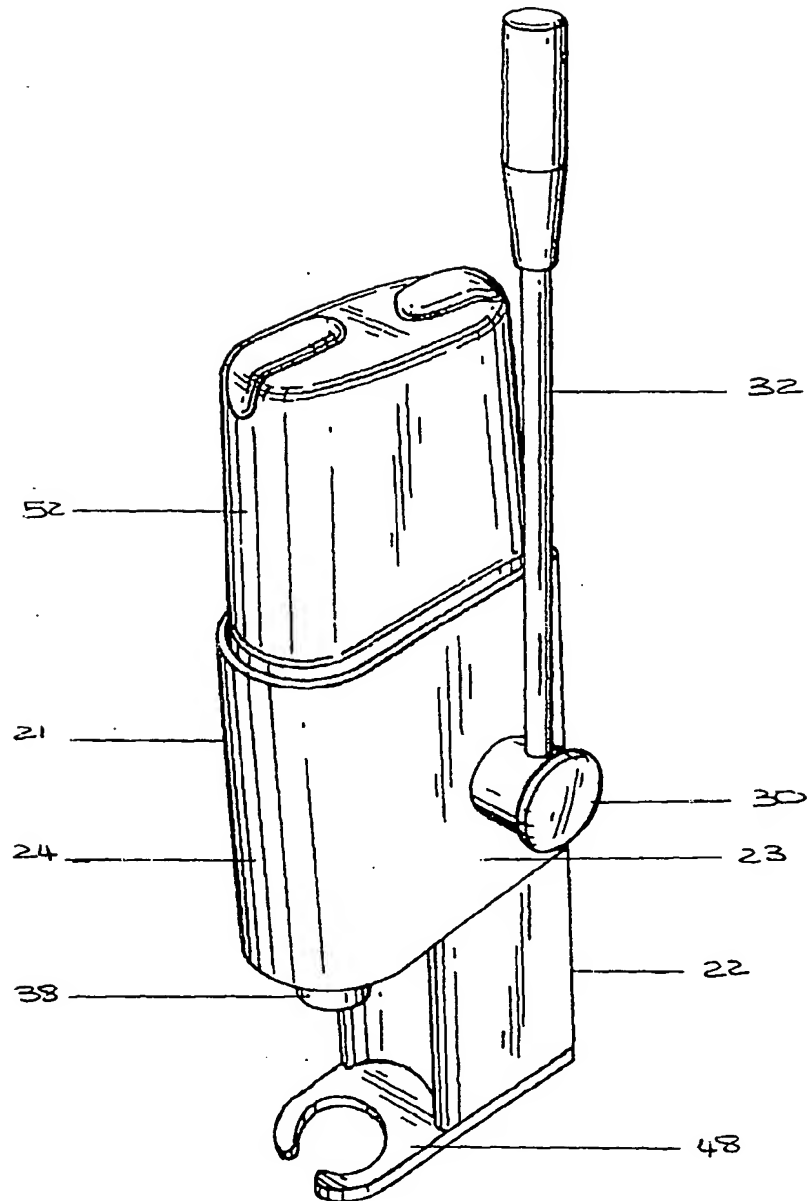


Figure 9

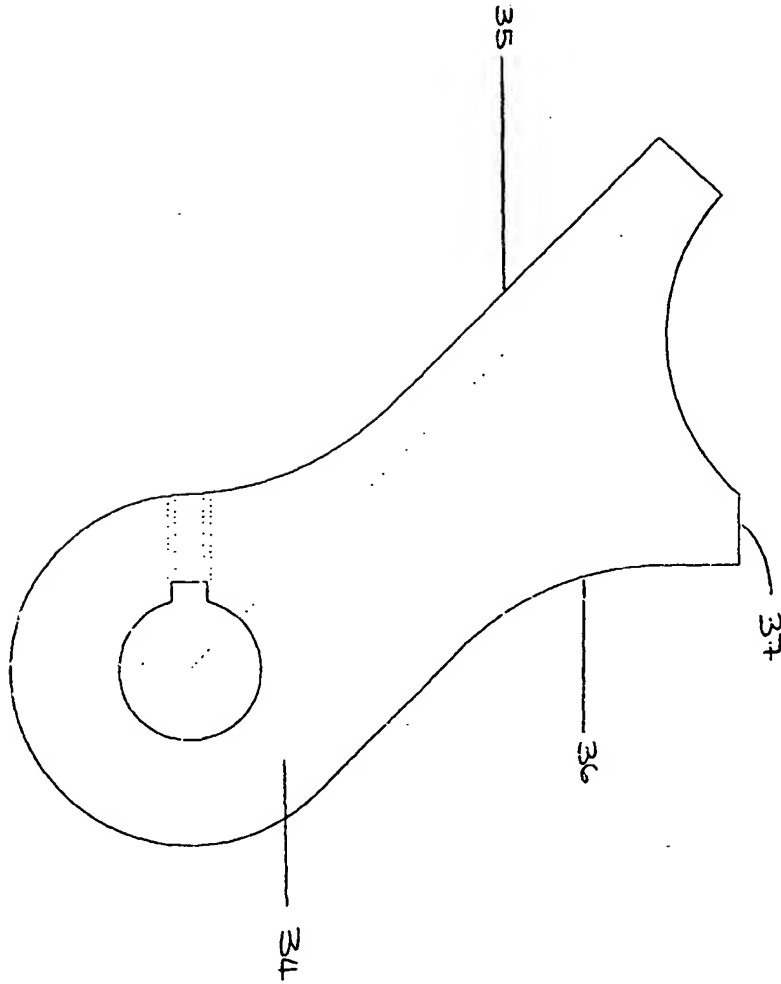


Figure 10

Section A-A

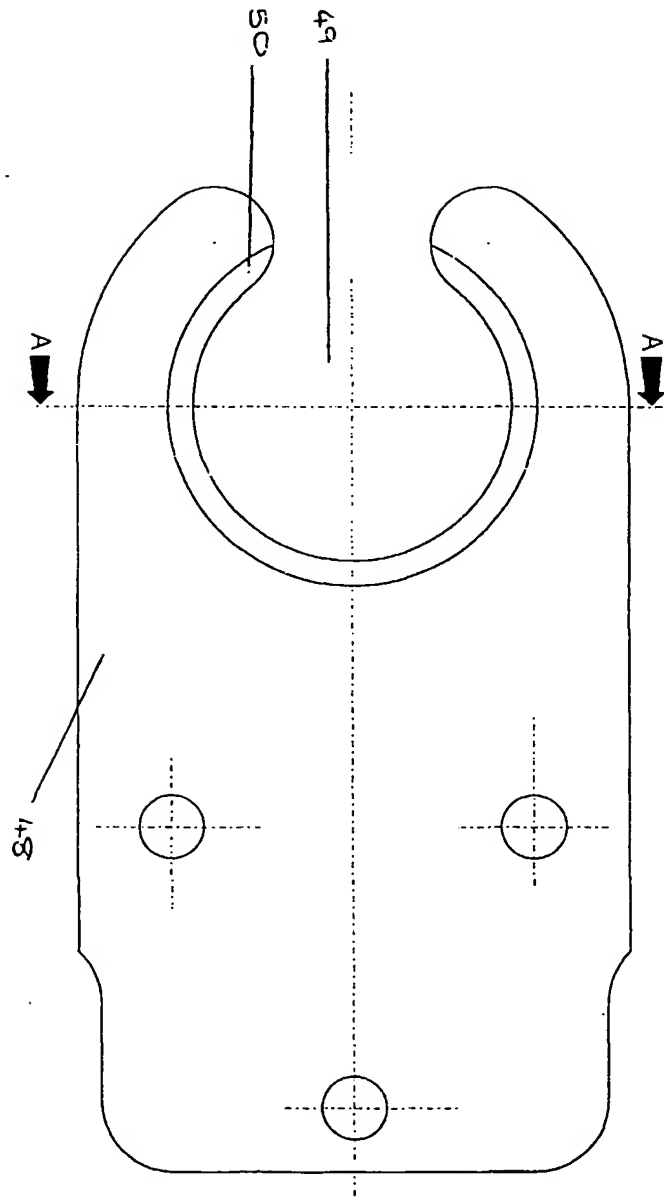


Figure 11

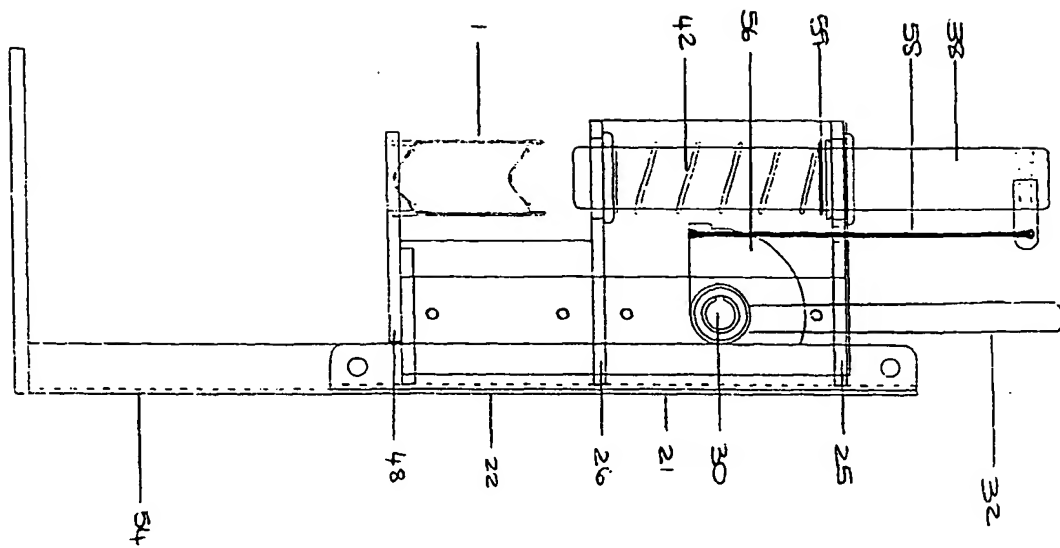
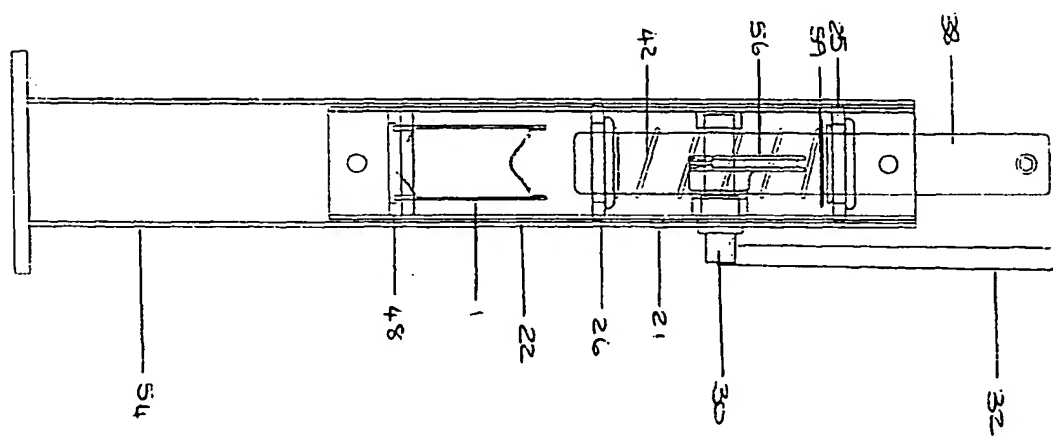


Figure 12



File 13



European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 98 11 9961

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
X	US 5 020 698 A (CROSSLEY JIMMY L) 4 June 1991 (1991-06-04) * the whole document *	1-7,9-11	B65B69/00 A23G9/28 A23G9/22 B65D85/78
X	US 2 889 949 A (M. NIRENBERG) 9 June 1959 (1959-06-09) * the whole document *	1-7,9,10	
X	WO 96 01224 A (MCGILL S.R.) 18 January 1996 (1996-01-18) * the whole document *	1,5-7, 9-17	
A,D	WO 94 13154 A (MCGILL G. S.) 23 June 1994 (1994-06-23) * the whole document *		
A	WO 92 19389 A (TOPPAN PRINTING CO LTD) 12 November 1992 (1992-11-12)		
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)
			B65B A23G B67D B65D
-The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search		Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE		19 March 1999	GUYON, R
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Application Number
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CLAIMS INCURRING FEES

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims.

- ☐ Only part of the claims have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claim(s):
- ☐ No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

see sheet B

- ☐ All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.
- ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, the Search Division did not invite payment of any additional fee.
- ☐ Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respect of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:
- ☒ None of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims:

1-17



European Patent
Office

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION
SHEET B

Application Number

EP 98 11 9961

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1. Claims: 1-17

Dispenser for delivering frozen desserts from one portion-sized cylindrical containers provided with nozzle and sliding piston, using support means for said containers, a reciprocating plunger and drive means the same.

2. Claims: 18-21

Dispenser for delivering frozen desserts from containers which are installed on a support means, using a reciprocating plunger and drive means for the same.

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 98 11 9961

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report.
The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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19-03-1999

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